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Group juggling is one of many learning tools **Beth Foreman**, student services specialist, uses to teach students communication and leadership skills.

JUGGLING LEADERSHIP, SCHOLARSHIP AND FUN

By Barbara McBreen

Tossing rubber chickens, stuffed pigs and numerous balls is a group activity Beth Foreman uses to illustrate teamwork and communication skills.

The activity is one of many experiential learning tools Foreman, student services specialist, uses with agricultural ambassadors. The students are college volunteers who give tours to prospective students and parents, host new student programs and work at various alumni and recruitment events.

In the group juggling exercise, students shout a name and toss a ball or stuffed item. As the activity continues, more items are added making it tougher to keep everything moving. To reflect, Foreman asks students what techniques made it easier to pass the ball to others in the group and keep the balls from dropping.

Foreman emphasizes how the rubber chicken, which is introduced near the end,

represents the problems students encounter.

"It's a teaching strategy that combines mental and physical challenges. It's a simple and effective concept—you play the activity, review what worked and reflect on how it applies in other situations," says Foreman.

She oversees the student-run ambassador program that is an essential part of the college's recruiting efforts. Foreman says prospective students visiting campus want to talk to students who are here on campus.

Molly Heintz, a senior in animal science, says talking to students was a big selling point when she visited Iowa State. Once she enrolled, she also joined the ambassadors.

"We do a lot of fun things, and you gain something at the end of every activity," Heintz says. "You always pick up a little piece of information that helps us communicate with students visiting the campus."

For the past 10 years Foreman has balanced a fulltime job while pursuing her doctorate degree. She coordinates group and individual visits for the college and advises and trains student ambassadors.

Her doctoral research is focused on the connection between student experiences and the development of leadership skills.

"I've gained a better understanding about how student involvement influences leadership and it's made my work with students more effective," says Foreman.

A Cyclone herself, with degrees in child, parent and community services and human development, she understands the importance of a positive student experience.

"I didn't grow up an Iowa State fan," Foreman says. "I became a fan because of my positive experiences as a student."

She's also seen evidence that her teaching strategies are working. Last year she overheard one student refer to a last-minute problem as a "rubber chicken."

Foreman, the ambassadors and her colleagues in student services are a large part of what has driven the college to record enrollment. In the fall of 2009 the college's enrollment hit a 30-year high of 3,082 undergraduate students. Last fall the college surpassed that record with an enrollment of 3,298. ■

Beth Foreman's doctoral research focused on how student involvement relates to leadership skills. She says her research has made her work with agriculture and life sciences students more effective.

Photo: Bob Elbert

